



## **It's Back to Nature as ComEd Goes Green**

March 7, 2000

BY ROBERT MANOR BUSINESS REPORTER

Commonwealth Edison, best known for running the largest fleet of nuclear plants in the country, hopes to generate some green electricity by offering money to customers who install small wind turbines or photovoltaic cells on their property.

ComEd has in the past expressed no interest in renewable energy resources. But on Monday, it announced an experimental program that will buy electricity from residential, commercial and manufacturing customers who generate power from photovoltaic cells or wind generators. The program was created in conjunction with the Environmental Law and Policy Center.

"It's a policy turnaround," said Mary O'Toole, ComEd's manager of environmental services. "We are trying to educate customers about the benefits of renewables."

ComEd is offering payments for excess energy that flows back to the company. The excess electricity will be measured by a second meter paid for by ComEd. The payments vary by time, season and the amount of power produced.

Howard Learner, director of the Environmental Law & Policy Center, said the new policy removes a barrier to use of small-scale renewable power generation.

"It's good for environmental quality and it's good for economic development," Learner said.

ComEd said a photovoltaic cell array suitable for a home might cost roughly \$10,000. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs is offering a grant or rebate that would reduce that to \$5,000.

Even advocates of solar energy acknowledge that it is cheaper to buy electricity from ComEd than generate it from the sun.

"It probably won't pay for itself," said Mark Wilkerson, vice president of Sunwise Technologies, a company which sells small-scale photovoltaic power systems.

"The motivation is not economic payback," Wilkerson said. "It's about doing the right thing for the environment." Illinois mostly lacks the strong steady breezes needed to run wind turbines, unlike parts of California and Iowa.

But Gabriela Martin, renewable products manager for ComEd, said wind turbines can work in some areas where a hill or valley, for example, provide the right kind of wind. "If there are certain geographic locations on your property, you may have enough wind resources to run a turbine," Martin said.